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**Media Release**  
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**Anti-Bullying Legislation Wins General Assembly Approval**  
*Proposals from Attorney General, Lieutenant Governor  
and Education Committee Chairs set to become law*

**DOVER** – A bill that implements a key component of a plan to combat cyber-bullying passed the House of Representatives on Thursday and is headed to the Governor's desk.

Senate Bill 193, sponsored by Sen. David Sokola and Rep. Terry Schooley, allows the Attorney General's office to defend school districts and charter schools if they face a legal challenge after implementing a statewide cyberbullying policy. Attorney General Beau Biden and Lt. Gov. Matt Denn began the process of drafting the statewide cyberbullying policy in the spring when they held statewide public hearings to gather factual evidence from school administrators and parents about the type of off-campus activity causing disruption in our schools. Once the policy is developed, the state's Department of Education will issue regulations requiring adoption of the statewide cyberbullying policy by public school districts and charter schools.

Nationally, 8.2 million students are bullied each year and 1 million are cyber-bullied. About 160,000 students stay home from school on any given day because they're afraid of being bullied. In Delaware, nearly 20 percent of students surveyed last year reported that another student issued a verbal threat against them, while 30 percent reported that they said something to another student to hurt them.

"The General Assembly recognized that although social networking technology has erased the boundary between the schoolyard and home, schools have had difficulty taking action against cyberbullies," Attorney General Biden said. "This legislation changes that by making sure my office can stand behind schools trying to make their campuses the safe, supportive learning environments our kids deserve. I want to thank Lt. Gov. Denn, Sen. Sokola, and Rep. Schooley for their hard work and advocacy to make this change happen."

"We are already hard at work developing this policy," said Lt. Governor Denn. "We've held the meetings, gotten great feedback, and look forward to presenting a policy that will protect our children and let them focus on learning and being kids instead of worrying about being bullied."

"I'm pleased to see that my colleagues in the House understand the dimensions of this problem and have acted to pass this bill," said Sen. David Sokola (D-Newark), the bill's lead sponsor. "It's an issue that can have a harmful effect on safety and school climate, both of which are vital to a student's ability to succeed in school. Fortunately, we have good guidance from the courts about how to address this in a Constitutionally-acceptable way and I'm confident that the attorney general and our education community will do just that."

Rep. Schooley (D-Newark), who sponsored the bill in the House, said “In this age of technology, young people use many different forms of social media, computers and cell phones to communicate and publicly post information. Unfortunately, these means of communication can be used to bully other young people in a more public way than previous generations could ever imagine. By passing this bill, we are trying to stay ahead of the curve and protect our children and grandchildren from cyber-bullying and let people know that bullying in any form is wrong and should not be tolerated.”

SB 193 is part of a two-bill package from Biden, Schooley and Sokola aimed at fighting bullying. HB 268, which passed both chambers of the legislature earlier this year, protects students against bullying by adding consistency in how bullying incidents are reported by schools.

The bill requires the Department of Education to annually audit schools to ensure that they are properly investigating and reporting bullying allegations. The legislation was developed from multiple community forums Attorney General Biden has held talking to students and parents about bullying, and from conversations he and Lt. Gov. Denn have had with district superintendents.

The legislation addresses a lack of consistency in how bullying incidents are reported by school districts. For example, Laurel Middle School, which has a four-star commendable rating, had the highest number of incidents (38 in a 344-student school) during the 2010-11 school year, but William Penn High with 1,981 students had zero reported incidents. And only one incident was reported in the entire Smyrna School District. School districts would be required to report unsubstantiated claims of bullying to the state Department of Education, in addition to the current requirement for reporting substantiated claims. The current law says substantiated claims must be reported within five business days. Often it takes longer than that for a school administrator to verify a student’s claim, so the incident never gets reported.

Additionally, the Attorney General’s Office’s bullying hotline (1-800-220-5414) must be posted on each school district’s website and in a conspicuous place in each school.

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